621 These are the principal resources of the community
622 treasury, which is held and administered by the dugu-tigi with
651 the help and under the control of the fa. The dugu-tigi may
652 use the treasury to help him perform his duties honorably, to assist unfortunate or indigent members of the community, to receive the guests of the community in a suitable manner, and to meet emergencies.

[661] Under no circumstances does this treasury constitute any part of the personal fortune of the dugu-tigi. Only usurpation, which is fairly common under various guises, alters this state of affairs. In the same way, it is not uncommon for this wealth to be divided in some measure among the members of the council, who in one way or another appropriate it. Such abuses, no matter how common, do not in the least alter the principle that legally such wealth is and remains exclusively the property of the community. [234]

Chapter 4

Brotherhoods

1. The End of Childhood

794 General considerations. The cult of the ancestors and of
881 the nyana dugu-da-siri are not enough for the Bambara in his efforts to make sure of the protection, help, and services of the invisible world. The magician has created for him some renowned protectors or servitors which are powerful and formidable: the nyana of the boli.

The cult of these gods gives rise to spiritual families whose members are so closely linked by the bonds of fraternity that we may safely say that these groupings are brotherhoods. All these brotherhoods share the common characteristic that no one can be received into them before having submitted to a certain rite called soli (1) or bolo-ko (1), terms which

1. Soli is the word for the action of piercing, emerging, laying an egg, or

794 brotherhoods together, although the latter seem to dominate the
621 former. These brotherhoods hem in the communities they dominate by abusively extending their jurisdiction far beyond its proper limits. Indeed, the faithful are not the only ones who are subject to the judgments handed down by the brotherhoods, whose clergy make decisions affecting not only members involved but often also third parties in the neighborhood or even people from neighboring or distant regions. The brotherhoods are tyrannical toward their own members and no less so to strangers, who often see no way of escaping persecution short of asking to be received into the ranks.

794 Thus, it is apparent how a brotherhood increases in size
● 661 and in power as time passes. Each year it takes in the young
182 people at the end of the soli, and as a result all the communities are at length absorbed by it live in it and for it (1). It

1. The following is a typical example.

[778] In the village of Marenna (Fouladougou Arbala), the natives belong to the cult of Ba-ku. This boli consists of a small sheaf of roots of the indigo tree. For every newborn child the nyana-tigi makes and consecrates a small Ba-ku, which he places in a gourd and puts in the temple of this nyana. At the time of the soli, the child becomes affiliated with the cult, takes the boli placed in the gourd for him at birth and henceforth wears it on his person. All the families in Marenna are thus closely involved in the cult of Ba-ku, being, as it were, engendered by this god to whom each person owes both physical and spiritual birth. Ba-ku comes from Sangaran, and his high priest is a Dyara; that is why he is invoked and called by the expression Ba-ku Dyara Sangaran-ka. The word ba-ku literally means "tail of a

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goat," and, indeed, that describes the appearance of the little bunch of roots. It is possible that the word Ba-ku is merely the profane name and that the real name of the nyana is kept secret.

claims eminent rights over every person or thing it touches, as a consequence of the supernatural power of the nyana protecting them. [268]

So it is that the brotherhood, by what might be called divine right, comes to play a political role which is inconsistent only because it was not designed to play such a role. Let an ambitious man come forth, one who knows how to make use of the organization and its redoubtable power for his own ends, and the brotherhood then becomes the cradle of a veritable political state.

So it is that when the regular authority cannot firmly resist its encroachments, the brotherhood becomes a kind of high judge and uses that high office to establish a reign of terror which exploits the defections due to hatreds its own machinations have aroused and encouraged. This wretched [578] game naturally brings repercussions within the brotherhood itself: the nyana-den' are at each other's throats, and the grimmest dramas accompany the indulgence of the lowest instincts. The chronicle of Ségou bears witness to these facts.

It is, unfortunately, by no means unusual for the established authority to condone these crimes through weakness, interest, or membership in the brotherhood. As a result, innumerable regions have fallen into anarchy.

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That is why and how the brotherhoods have been the cause of a great deal of unrest in the native milieu. As a refuge for escaped slaves, malcontents, vagabonds, intriguers, in a word, for all enemies of public order, the brotherhoods everywhere set themselves up in opposition to regularly constituted authority, and when they are unable to take it over, seek to thwart it by taking the head into partnership.

The dynastic convulsions of most of the Sudanese empires, especially that of Ségou, are in large part explained by the usurpations of these great brotherhoods of nyana.

614 The dugu have definite territorial domains, and they,
621 too, prefer to live without the subordination of any one of them
631 to the others. There are relationships between some of them, such as some being offshoots of others and, due to proximity, many matrimonial unions have bound them together.

Unavoidable necessity also often forces the dugu to form leagues, coalitions, or more often associations called kafu' (literally, "union"). Depending on the circumstances, a chief is elected by the association or he usurps the authority over it. This sometimes results in the creation of a political or administrative organization. The Ségala area, also called Sénébala, is an example. "It has a local history of several centuries, hereditary chiefs of several dynasties, social and matrimonial bonds and customary institutions which have persisted for generations; it is a nation and a fatherland" (2).

2. In Marty, Etudes sur l'Islam et les tribus du Soudan [Studies on Islam and the Tribes of the Sudan], Vol. 4, p. 105.

614 It also may happen that someone who becomes a chief
631 will be so enamored with the exercise and the profits of
661 power that with the support of his followers -- relatives or others -- he will manage to retain permanent control. This association is what we here call a clan; the Bambara designate it by the word ton', applicable to any association.

As an organism of authority, this clan may be defined as an oligarchic government founded for the sole purpose of subjugating, by any means, the individuals it can reach for the sake of exploiting them. Those who are enfeoffed to this government are called "the people of So-and-So" or "the people of such and such place" by the Bambara, as by other natives, [289] for example: the Massa-si-u (1).

1. From another point of view, Massa-si-u means "descendants of Massa," and hence, "the tribe of Massa."

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628 When differences arise between fla-n-ton', an arbitrator is chosen by these fla-n-ton'; in some regions, there is even an arbitrator designated in advance.

Among all these fla-n-ton' the most conspicuous is the one having the largest number of young bachelors known as "the young masters" (kamalen'-u). Being much given to idleness, the kamalen'-u are troublemakers and rebels who seek all the [292] material pleasures and devote their talents to opposing the fa, the bina, and those who, as masters of the community, impose on the young the whole weight of an authority which is absolute and often niggling.

This explanation makes it plain that the post of ton'-tigi is no sinecure. In order to maintain his role honorably, the ton'-tigi must be capable of exerting his authority in subtle and shrewd ways, for the ton'-den' are touchy and undisciplined, and they are quick to claim the equality which is the basis of their association, even to the point of egalitarian mania or egalitarianism. Therefore, it is interesting to note that the regulations, fantastic at first glance, which inflict penalties for performing the most trivial acts are actually very effective; they correct in fun, but they represent a kind of restraint that encourages the development of discipline. Breaking with ordinary life, they tend through repetition to form habits which taken together make
• [661] up what we call esprit de corps. In any event, the development which we are about to describe shows conclusively that to maintain and conserve his power the ton'-tigi must exert authority by dissimulation, by persuading those most easily offended that he is subordinating his own acts to their wishes and at the same time appearing to the faint-hearted as an imperious and audacious leader. Furthermore, he must render service to everyone and know how to turn projects and adventures, even the riskiest, into profit for the community.

Since he is the target of the hostility of the elders, who often suffer from the activities of the ton'-den', and since he is constantly envied by some of these same ton'-den' for his success, he acquires the kind of experience which makes him a crafty and sly politician, completely devoid of scruples.

773 We shall see how Mamari (called Biton) Kouloubali managed to prevail over the tyrannical egalitarianism of the

614 dyon'-kuntigi who had acted as electors. When it was time to
782 eat, they squatted on the ground around the gourd with their
*173 backs to it, and in this position and without turning their heads to make a choice, [305] they dipped into the dish and took a piece which might be animal or human. This meal constituted a communion by which those partaking of it were so closely linked that ba Kongo-ba was supposed to kill any one of them who should commit perjury by failing in the loyalty he owed to the man elected.

614 The choice made was then definitive, and the man elected
*173 was put through a test intended to indicate the length of his reign. To make this test, the newly elected chief's throat was wrapped in one of the cotton bands used to make native loincloths; two of the bystanders pulled the two ends in opposite directions while the victim feverishly plunged his hands into a gourd containing a mixture of small pebbles and ground baobab leaves. The number of pebbles he managed to pick out in one try was the number of years in his reign. When this number of years had passed, the fama was strangled with the strip of cotton. If his rule had been popular, however, he was left in office until the first complaint was lodged against him.

Such is the tradition. Though it is acceptable in essentials, it is less so in certain details when comparison is made with the chronicle which makes no reference to this uniform death by strangulation or to determining in advance the length of the reign.

One thing that is certain is the oath of loyalty which followed every election and which was also often demanded by the fama during the course of his reign. This oath unquestionably had a sacramental form, characterized by a communion under the patronage of the idol. What the chronicle has to say about the election of Ngolo Dyara shows that the man elected was also required to participate in the oath, thus making it reciprocal.
• [661] Ngolo managed to avoid taking the oath, and so his electors bore the whole burden of it; this is one of the means by which despots of all lands pave the way for their tyranny.